

Lake Mead's Cold War Legacy

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Lake Mead National Recreation Area



As the Second World War drew to a close, changes in global politics led to a military, political and technological confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union that lasted for almost fifty years. During this Cold War, vast resources were used by both sides to gather scientific information that could be used for military purposes. Many of these projects occurred in the regions surrounding Lake Mead.

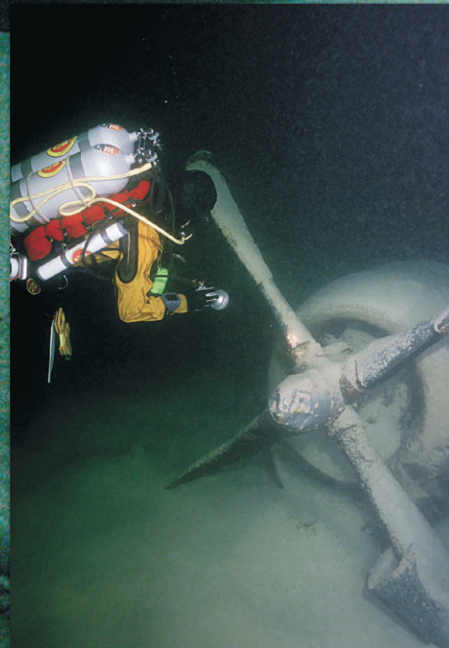


On July 21, 1948 a B-29 Superfortress engaged in high altitude atmospheric research crashed into the Overton Arm of Lake Mead. The crew of five survived the crash, but the plane was lost in the depths of the lake. In August 2001, local divers found the plane.



B-29 Superfortresses were America's primary weapon in the air war against Japan during the closing days of World War II. With a pressurized crew compartment, a ten-ton bomb load and a 3,250 mile range, the B-29 was the largest, most advanced aircraft of its day.

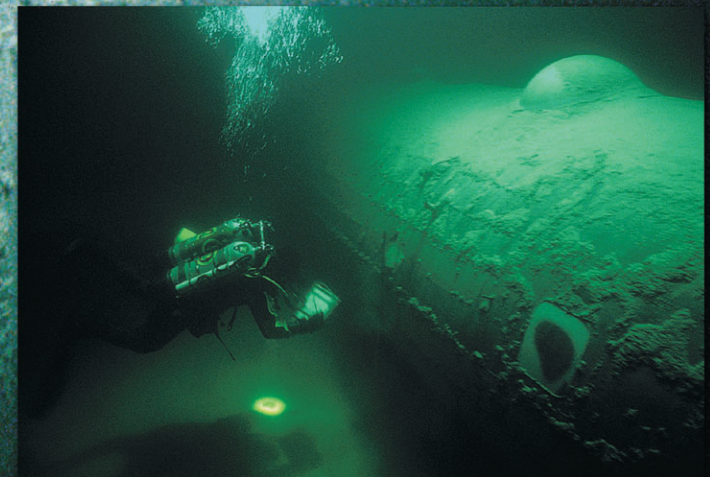
During the early stages of the Cold War, these massive bombers played a key role in maintaining the strategic balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union.



When the plane hit the lake, three of the four engines tore off. The plane skipped like a stone for more than a quarter mile before coming to rest in its current location.



In June 2003, archeologists from the N.P.S. Submerged Resources Center mapped and documented the wreck for management and educational purposes.



Measurements of the plane and environmental information about the water that covers it are providing a scientific understanding of the processes of preservation in the cold, dark waters of Overton Arm.

This B-29, once a potent weapon in a global confrontation, is now an important historical resource for visitors to Lake Mead and for the American people.